

## Word Stress: compounds and complex words (words+affixes)

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### ❖ Complex Word Stress

Complex words are grouped into two major categories:

- (1) **Affix words:** words made from a root (a basic stem word) with the addition of one or more affixes, prefix(es) or a suffix(es).
- (2) **Compound words:** words composed of more than one root morpheme (mostly two free morphemes) but function like single units in semantic terms.

Stress assignment in complex words is guided by a fairly complex set of rules. It is worth mentioning that the rules provided below do not cover the stress patterns of all affix words.

### 1. Placement of Stress in Affix Words

The addition of affixes affects the placement of word stress in three main ways:

1. Stress falls on the affix itself (*circle* but *semicircle*: the addition of the prefix *semi-* causes the stress to shift from *circle* to *semi-* / *profiteer*: the addition of the suffix *-eer* causes the stress to shift from the first syllable in *profit* to the ultimate syllable containing the suffix *-eer*).
2. No effect: the affix does not make any difference to the stress pattern of the resulting word ('comfortable: the addition to 'comfort has no effect on the placement of stress, which remains on 'comfort / 'marketing: the addition to 'market has no effect on the placement of stress, which remains on 'market).
3. Stress is shifted from its original position to a different syllable in the stem. ('magnet but mag'netic: the addition of the suffix *-ic* to 'magnet causes the stress to shift from the first syllable of the stem to the second syllable of the stem).|

#### 1.1. Placement of Stress in Suffix Words

➤ **Stress-bearing (attracting) suffixes:** ( always constitute heavy syllables).

- ee:     *refu'gee , tru'stee, absentee, amputee*
- eer:    *mountai'neer, volun'teer , profiteer*
- ese:    *Portu'guese, Japanese, Sudanese, Vietnamese*
- ette:   *ciga'rette, kitchenette, statuette, usherette, diskette*
- esque: *pictu'resque, arabesque*

➤ **Stress-neutral suffixes:** Such suffixes include the inflectional suffixes

(plural; possessive; third person singular present tense -s; progressive -ing; past -ed; past participle -en/-ed; comparative -er; and superlative -est), and several derivational ones:

-able: 'comfort - 'comfortable	-age: 'anchor - 'anchorage
-al: re'fuse - re'fus <u>al</u>	-en: 'wide - 'widen
-ful: 'wonder - 'wonderful	-ing: a'maze - a'mazing
-ish: 'devil - 'devilish	-like: 'child - 'childlike
-less: 'power - 'powerless	-ly: 'hurried - 'hurriedly
-ment: e'stablish - e'stablishment	-ness: 'frank - 'frankness
-ship : friend - friendship	-some : burden - burdensome
-ous: 'poison - 'poisonous	-fy: 'glory - 'glorify
-ess: host - hostess	-ant ascend -ascendant
-dom: free- freedom	-hood: nation -nationhood
-ism: alcohol – alcoholism	-ist : human - humanist
-ise : special - specialise	-ty: certain - certainty
-ly: (used to make adverbs): tangible - tangibly	
-y : ( the adjective forming suffix –y) : silk –silky	

➤ **Stress-Shifting Suffixes**

A great deal of derivational suffixes, when added to a root, shift the stress from a syllable to another syllable:

-e <u>ous</u> : advantage - advan'tageous	/ courage - coura <u>geous</u>
-y: phot <u>o</u> graph - pho'tography	/ homoph <u>o</u> ne-homoph <u>o</u> ny
-a <u>l</u> : com <u>me</u> rce - com'mercial	/ origin- origi <u>n</u> al / context- context <u>u</u> al
-i <u>c</u> : clim <u>a</u> te - cli'matic	/ energy- en <u>e</u> rgetic
-i <u>cal</u> ge <u>o</u> metry – ge <u>o</u> metrical	/ phonology- pho <u>n</u> ological
-i <u>on</u> : per <u>f</u> ect - per 'fection	/ deter <u>m</u> ine- deter <u>m</u> ination
-i <u>ous</u> : lux <u>u</u> ry - lu'xurious	/ lab <u>o</u> ur – labo <u>r</u> ious / har <u>m</u> ony - har <u>m</u> onious
-t <u>y</u> : tran <u>q</u> uill- tran'quility	/ hu <u>m</u> id -hu <u>m</u> idity
-i <u>an</u> lib <u>r</u> ary – lib <u>r</u> arian	/ hi <u>s</u> tory - hi <u>s</u> torian

### Other Useful Rules

#### ➤ Stress on the penultimate syllable:

##### (1) Words ending in **-ic /ics**

spe'cific - diplo'matic - emphatic - ro'mantic- critic- italic- physics- electronic(s)- aromatic - energetic- pandemic - scientific - mathematics - statistics- republic idio'matic - demo'cratic - au'thentic - fan'tastic - pho'netics - pessimistic- dramatic ritua'listic - sympto'matic

The most common **exceptions**: 'Arabic - a'rithmetic - 'arsenic - 'catholic - 'lunatic - 'politic(s) - 'rhetoric.

(2) Words ending in **-ion** : sensation- multiplication, sus'picion - mystification- 'legion - 'cushion - 'tension - tradition- 'caption - vari'ation - exploi'tation - excla'mation - consti'tution - compen'sation - di'mension - trans'lation - satis'faction - suppo'sition - me'dallion - pre'caution -fraction-nation- education- abolition- recog'nition

##### (3) Words ending in **-ence**

corre'spondence- p'rominence- 'eminence, reticence, competence but in'sistence

#### ➤ Stress on the antepenultimate syllable:

##### (1) Words ending in **-ical**

e'lectrical - me'chanical - eco'nomical - paren'thetical - psycho'logical - geo'metrical- astronomical - pedagogical

##### (2) Words ending in **-icist, -icize or -icism, -ism**

'organism - ro'manticism- ca'tholicism- 'criticism- 'physicist -'classicist- I'talicize- po'liticize

##### (3) Words ending in **-ional, -ionist, -ionism and -ionize**

sen'sational - emotional- tra'ditional - 'fractional - correctional, 'national - abo'litionist - im'pressionism - per'fectionism - revo'lutionize - 'unionize - edu'cationist

##### (4) Words ending in **-acy**: democracy- diplomacy- aristocracy- infancy- appropriacy

##### (5) Words ending in **-ity**

ability, connectivity, tranquillity, electricity, fidelity, validity, credibility, opportunity

➤ **Stress on the syllable prior to the following endings:**

**-io** : port'folio, 'ratio, 'patio, 'radio.

**-ior** : 'senior, su'perior, 'junior.

**-ious** : dubious , sus'picious, har'monious, a'trocious. misterious

**-eous** : spon'taneous, advan'tageous, cou'rageous.

**-uous** : presumptuous ,con'temptuous, con'tinuous, 'virtuous.

**-ian** : his'torian, gram'marian, phone'tician, elec'trician, li'brarian

**3.4.1. Placement of Stress in Prefix Words**

As a general rule, prefixes in English do not usually change the pattern of stress.

**re-** : reactivate, recapitulate, react, reiterate

**un-**: unhealthy, unwise, unnecessary

**in-**: intolerant, insufficient, indifferent

**mis-**: misplace, misrepresent, misunderstand

**dis-**: discourage, disintegrate, discolour

**il-**: illegal, illiterate, illegible

**over-** : overcrowded, overexpose, overlook

❖ **Stress in Compound Words**

**3.4.2. Placement of Stress in Compound Words**

Compound words are stressed either on the first element or on the second. Secondary stress may fall on the word which does not receive stress. There are three major categories of compound words: noun compounds, adjective compounds and verb compounds.

**Noun compounds:**

Noun compounds are the most frequent compounds in English. They are of three types: noun + noun , adjective + noun and verb +noun.

- In noun + noun compounds, the first element of the compound receives primary stress.

<i>airplane</i>	<i>classroom</i>	<i>cowboy</i>	<i>mailbox</i>	<i>'dressing gown</i>
<i>newspaper</i>	<i>'suitcase</i>	<i>sunrise</i>	<i>'lipstick</i>	<i>'sitting room</i>
<i>'tea-cup</i>	<i>'orange juice</i>	<i>airport</i>	<i>'drugstore</i>	<i>'cheesecake</i>

## Phonetics/Second year/S2

- The same stress pattern applies to verb + adjective compounds and some adjective + noun compounds :

*pickpocket*                      *blackboard*                      *hot dog*  
*stop watch*                      *darkroom*                      *easy street*

- Most adjective+ noun compound nouns have main stress on the second part and secondary stress on the first part:

*social se'curity*                      *hot po'tato*                      *absolute 'zero*  
*inverted 'commas*                      *central 'heating*                      *split in'finitive*

### Adjective Compounds

These compounds are fairly divided between those with first element stressed and those with second element stressed.

- Noun+ adjective compounds are stressed on the first word:

*carefree, lovesick, headstrong, trustworthy, workshy, bloodthirsty, nationwide*

- Noun +past participle compounds are also stressed on the first element:  
*bedridden, sunlit, time-honoured, weather-beaten, henpecked*

However, the following combinations are stressed on the second word:

- adjectives with an adjectival first element and the –ed morpheme at the end.  
*,bad-'tempered      ,half-'timbered      ,heavy-'handed      ,old-fashioned*  
*,deep-seated      ,long-winded*

- Adjective + verb+ ing and adjective + adjective.

*,Easy 'going      ,high 'flying      ,long 'suffering      ,red 'hot*

- Noun+ adjective where the noun modifies the adjective:

*sky blue, stone dead, tax free, user friendly, skin deep, dirt cheap, stone deaf*

- compounds in which the first element is a number

*three-'wheeler      first-'class      five-'finger      five 'star (adj)*



### Verb Compounds

If we exclude phrasal verbs, the number of verb compounds is limited.

➤ Verb compounds are usually stressed on the initial word:

<i>baby-sit</i>	<i>spoon-feed</i>	<i>car wash</i>	<i>badmouth</i>	<i>backbite</i>
<i>side step</i>	<i>wheel clamp</i>	<i>dry-clean</i>	<i>drop-kick</i>	<i>headhunt</i>

### Stress in compound words and phrases

Sometimes a compound looks the same as a phrase consisting of a normal adjective and a noun but the pronunciation is different. Compare:

- a. *We keep these plants in a 'greenhouse during the Winter months.* (a compound).
- b. *Mr Olsen lives in a small, 'green 'house next to the river.* (a phrase)

In (b), the words *green* and *house* form a phrase, and mean something different from the compound noun in (a).

If the words form a compound, stress is placed on the first element of the compound and if it is a phrase both words (the adjective and the noun) receive stress. Examples of other word sequences that can function as either noun compounds or a phrase are *whitehouse*, *blackbird*, *coldcream*, *yellowjacket*, *hot plate*.

Place names such as *Oxford Circus*, *Waterloo Bridge*, *Paddington Station*, *Lexington Avenue*, *Piccadilly Circus* are usually phrases and main stress falls on the second element. The exception is when the last element is street (e.g. *Oxford Street*), in which case they are compounds.

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#### 3.4.3. Variable Stress

The stress pattern is not always fixed and unchanging in English words; there are cases where stress shifts to another position. The two main reasons why this occurs include the fact that in connected speech, some words are influenced by the adjacent words and the fact that not all speakers agree on the placement of stress in some words.

- When the final- stressed compound words are used before a word that begins with a strongly stressed syllable, stress tends to shift to the first word of the compound.

Compare:

1.a. *The performance was really first-'rate.*

1.b. *She runs a 'first-rate 'business.*

Other examples:

<i>bad-'tempered</i>	but	<i>a 'bad-tempered 'teacher</i>
<i>heavy-'handed</i>	but	<i>a 'heavy-handed 'sentence</i>
<i>half-'timbered</i>	but	<i>a 'half-timbered 'house</i>
<i>old-'fashioned</i>	but	<i>'old-fashioned 'clothes</i>
<i>second 'class</i>	but	<i>a 'second class 'citizen</i>
<i>part 'time</i>	but	<i>a 'part time 'teacher</i>

- The same rule applies to other words when followed by a stressed syllable.

1 <sup>st</sup> word in isolation	2 <sup>nd</sup> word in isolation	The phrase
<i>Chi'nese</i>	<i>'takeaway</i>	<i>'Chinese 'takeaway</i>
<i>Water'loo</i>	<i>'station</i>	<i>'Waterloo 'Station</i>
<i>thir'teen</i>	<i>'dollars</i>	<i>'thirteen 'dollars</i>

### 3.4.4. Word-Class Pairs

Some two syllable words with identical spelling are verbs, nouns and adjectives. The different forms (V, N, A) are distinguished simply by changes in stress. The stress is assigned to the second syllable if the word is a verb (contract, abstract) , but to the first syllable if the word is a noun or an adjective (contract, abstract). In many words, the difference of stress is also accompanied by vowel reduction in the unstressed syllable, and thus these word class pairs are not homophonous.

## Phonetics/Second year/S2

Word	Noun (N)	Verb (V)	Adjective (A)
abstract	'æbstrækt	æb'strækt	'æbstrækt
conduct	'kɒndʌkt	kən'dʌkt	
contract	'kɒntrækt	kən'trækt	
contrast	'kɒntrɑːst	kən'trɑːst	
decrease	'diːkriːs	dɪ'kriːs	
desert	'dezət	dɪ'zɜːt	
export	'eks pɔːt	ɪk'sp ɔːt	
import	'ɪmp ɔːt	ɪm'p ɔːt	
increase	'ɪnkriːs	ɪn'kriːs	
insult	'ɪnsʌlt	ɪn'sʌlt	
object	'ɒbdʒɪkt	əb'dʒekt	
perfect	/	pə'fekt	
permit	'pɜːmɪt	pə'mɪt	
present	'preznt	pri'zent	
produce	'prɒdjuːs	prə'djuːs	
progress	'prəʊɡes	prə'ɡres	
protest	'prəʊtest	prə'test	
rebel	'rebl	ri'bel	
record	'rek ɔːd	ri'k ɔːd	
refund	'riːf ʌnd	ri'f ʌnd	
reject	'riːdʒekt	ri'dʒekt	
subject	'sʌbdʒɪkt	səb'dʒekt	
suspect	'sʌspekt	sə'spekt	

Finally, there is not always a change of stress in these two-syllable words that are both nouns and verbs. For example the words *accept, silence, triumph, harvest, promise, surprise, delay, result, answer, picture, reply, travel, visit* have the same stress pattern for both nouns and verbs.



## The sentence stress

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### 1. Sentence stress

Notice the stress patterns:

<i>Volunteer</i>	<i>she can 'hear</i>
<i>Pre'sented</i>	<i>he 'sent it</i>
<i>Ap'proximate</i>	<i>a 'box of it</i>
<i>Electrifi'cation</i>	<i>she 'went to the 'station</i>

While word stress refers to the stress pattern a word has when it is pronounced in isolation, sentence stress refers to stress patterns of words when they are used in connected speech.

Sentence stress is the relative degree of force or emphasis by which a speaker pronounces words within a stretch of speech. While certain words (or more precisely syllables) are stressed other words are unstressed and quickly pronounced.

### 2. Functions of Sentence Stress

Sentence stress has two main functions:

- **Function 1:** Indicating the important words in the sentence.

*'Tom could 'hardly 'believe his 'eyes.*

*They could have 'chosen a 'better 'time for their 'holiday.*

The words *Tom*, *hardly*, *believe* and *eyes* (in the first sentence) and *chosen*, *better*, *time*, *holiday* (in the second sentence) are stressed because they are important for the meaning of the sentence. These words belong to the category of content words which contrasts with the category of function words or grammatical words.

<b>Content (lexical ) words</b> Usually stressed	<b>Function (grammatical ) words</b> Usually unstressed
Nouns / verbs / adjectives	articles / auxiliary verbs
Adverbs / possessive pronouns	personal pronouns
demonstrative pronouns/ interrogatives	possessive adjectives
not/ negative contractions	demonstrative adjectives
adverbial particles	prepositions / conjunctions

While the content words tend to be stressed because they are important for the conveyance of the message, the function words, which are less important and are mainly used to signify grammatical relationships among content words in the sentence are usually unstressed and quickly pronounced. Noticeable in English is the fact that vowels in unstressed syllables are systematically reduced (*could*, *have* and *for* in the sentences above are reduced to / ə /). So, as a general rule, it is more usual for content words to be stressed than function words.

- **Function 2:** serving as the basis for the rhythmical structure of the sentence. The alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables results in what is called language rhythm.
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## Rhythm

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### 3. Sentence Stress and the Stress-Timed Rhythm of English

Another feature that is closely related to stress is rhythm. The notion of **rhythm** involves the occurrence of the same event at regular intervals of time (the same event happening at regular time intervals). Rhythm is clearly noticed in a heart-beat, a flashing light, a clock sound, a swimmer's strokes or a piece of music.

It has often been claimed that English speech is rhythmical and that English is a stress-timed language because it has a stress-timed rhythm, which is detectable in the regular occurrence of stressed syllables (this regular occurrence of stressed syllables is only relative: it is not possible to say with certainty that the stressed syllable occur at the same time interval but rather at approximately the same time interval).

More specifically, the theory that English has stress-timed rhythm suggests that the time from a stressed syllable to another stressed syllable tends to be the same irrespective of the number of the intervening unstressed syllables. In other words, stressed syllables tend to occur at relatively regular intervals whether they are separated by unstressed syllables or not.

Example:

1        2            3            4            5

*'Walk 'down the 'path to the 'end of the ca'nal*

In this sentence, there are eleven syllables, of which five are stressed. These stressed syllables are given numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. While The first two syllables are not separated by any unstressed syllables, the number of unstressed syllables between the other stressed syllables varies: there is one unstressed syllable between syllable 2 and 3, two between syllable 3 and 4 and three between syllable 4 and 5.

The stress-timed rhythm theory states that the time from each stressed syllable to the next will tend to be the same, irrespective of the number of intervening unstressed syllables. In other words, the amount of time it takes to say a sentence in stress-timed language depends on the number of stressed syllables only, not on the total number of syllables.

It follows, then, that in English, two sentences with the same number of stressed syllables tend to take the same time to speak regardless of the total number of syllables in each sentence. Moreover, a shorter sentence with more stressed syllables takes more time than a long sentence with less stressed syllables.

Examples:

1. *'Walk 'down the 'path to the 'end of the ca'nal.*
2. *A'manda and 'Peter can 'visit us on 'Friday and 'Saturday.*

There are five stressed syllables in Sentence 1 and 2, so they take about the same time to be pronounced even though Sentence 2 is longer than sentence 1.

3. *'Tom could 'hardly 'believe his 'eyes.*
4. *They could have 'chosen a 'better 'time for their 'holiday.*

The same observation above applies to sentences 3 and 4.

5. *'Tom 'goes to 'school by 'bus.*
6. *The 'cats could have been 'chasing the 'mice.*

There are four stressed syllables in sentence 5 while there are only four in sentence 6. Despite of the fact that sentence 5 is shorter (it contains 6 syllables), it takes more time in pronunciation than sentence 6 which is longer but contains less stressed syllables.

The stress-timed rhythm contrasts with the syllable-timed rhythm, which implies that the time from a syllable to another syllable, whether stressed or unstressed tends to be the same. In other words, the amount of time it takes to say a sentence depends on the total number of syllables in the sentence, not on the number of stressed syllables. French and Italian are examples of languages which have syllable-timed rhythm. In these languages, each syllable (stressed or unstressed) has equal importance, and therefore equal time is needed for all syllables and so, the time from a stressed syllable to the following stressed syllable will depend on the number of the intervening unstressed syllables.

#### 4. The foot

The foot is a unit of rhythm that begins with a stressed syllable and continues up to, but not including, the following stressed syllable. Examples of sentences divided into feet are provided below:

a.        1 |            2 |            3 |            4 |    5

'Walk | 'down the | 'path to the | 'end of the ca | 'nal

b.            1 |            2 |            3 |    4

'Tom could | 'hardly be | 'lieve his | 'eyes

c.        |                            1 |            2 |    3

The 'cats could have been | 'chasing the | 'mice

d.                            |            1 |            2 |            3 |    4

They could have | 'chosen a | 'better | 'time for their | 'holiday

The fact that feet last for approximately the same time regardless of the number of syllables they contain is responsible for the stress-timed rhythm of English.

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## Intonation and tone

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### 1. Definitions

#### 1.1. Intonation

Intonation is widely defined as the melody of speech and refers to the changing pitch of the voice to convey meaning. In other words, intonation is defined as the variations which take place in the pitch of the voice in connected speech (the pitch can be changed by changing the frequency of vibration of the vocal folds: a high frequency of vibration causes us to hear a high pitch, and a low frequency of vibration causes us to hear a low pitch).

#### 1.2. Thought groups

Thought groups (also referred to as sense groups) are the chunks of language between pauses (a unit of speech bounded by pauses). When we speak, we tend to group words together in chunks that make a complete thought, often bounded by short pauses.

#### 1.3. Tone

A thought group has movement, of music and rhythm, associated with the pitch of voice. This certain pattern of voice movement is **tone**. By means of tones, speakers signal whether to refer, proclaim, agree, disagree, question or indicate completion and continuation of turn-taking in speech.

#### 1.4. Tone unit

In the study of intonation it is usual to divide speech into larger units than syllables. In longer utterances, there must be some points which mark a break between the end of one pattern and the beginning of the next. These breaks divide speech into tone-units, and are called tone-unit boundaries. An 'intonation unit' (also called intonation-group, tone group or tone-unit) is a piece of utterance, a continuous stream of sounds, bounded by a fairly perceptible pause and said under a single intonation contour.

### 1.5. Tonic (tonic syllable, also called nucleus) / tail / head / pre-head

Within each thought group (or more specifically each intonation unit), there is usually one syllable which carries maximal prominence. This syllable is referred to as the tonic. The latter is important because it carries not only the major stress, but also the major pitch change: it changes according to the meaning intended by the speaker.

For example, this is the normal way of saying the following sentence:

I am WRItIng a LETter to him NOW.

There are ten syllables in this sentence among which three are stressed syllables. The last stressed syllable is NOW. So we say that NOW has the focus stress, and is the **tonic** syllable and therefore is the **nucleus** of the intonation unit. The nucleus is the essential part of the intonation unit. It is still present even if the unit consists of a single syllable, as is the case with many sentence words like *yes, no, why*, etc.

Any syllable or syllables that may follow the nucleus in an intonation unit are called the "**tail**". In the sentence "I am WRItIng a LETter to him", the three unstressed syllables after the nucleus are called the "tail" of this intonation unit.

The part of an intonation unit that extends from the first stressed syllable up to the nucleus is called the "**head**" of the intonation unit. In the sentence "I am WRItIng a LETter to him", the "head" of this intonation unit is made up of three syllables: "writing a". Any unstressed syllable or syllables that may precede the "head", or the "nucleus" if there is no head, are called the "**pre-head**". In the sentence "I am WRItIng a LETter to him", "I am" comprises the "pre-head" of this intonation unit. The tail, head, and pre-head are optional whereas the nucleus is obligatory.

## 2. Types of Tones

In connected speech, the voice-pitch is continually rising and falling. These variations produce intonations which may be described as "tunes", "patterns" or "contours". When the

pitch of the voice rises we have a rising intonation; when it falls we have a falling intonation; when it remains on one note for an appreciable time, we have level intonation. several intonation patterns are used in RP. The four commonest ones are the falling tone (Fall) , the rising tone (rise), falling-rising tone and rising-falling tones.

### **2.1. Fall ( \ )**

A falling tone , the most common type, is assertive and conclusive. It denotes finality, completion and confidence (belief in the content of the utterance). It is used for asking and giving information in normal, quiet, un-emphatic style. It is used in complete statements (not implying any continuation known to the speaker), WH questions (containing a specific interrogative word such as when, where, who, why, how...etc), commands, exclamatory sentences, in the last alternative of alternative questions, in the first part of tag questions and in the second part if the speaker expects the answer “yes”.

#### **Statements:**

She is a \TEAcher. - It's \RAINing.

He finished it \YESterday. - I'm absolutely \CERtain.

#### **Wh questions:**

Where does she \WORK? - How did you get to \KNOW it?

#### **Commands:**

Shut the door at \ONCE. - Come \HERE

Do what I \TELL you. - Stop \TALking.

#### **Exclamatory sentences:**

What a wonderful \DAY!

#### **Alternative questions:**

Do you want /COFfee or \TEA?

Would you like to go for a /WALK or would you rather stay \HOME?

Shall we /WALK, or go by /BUS or take the \UNderground?

#### **Tag questions (seeking agreement):**

You study \ENGLISH, \DON'T you? ( I am sure you study English and I expect the answer “yes”).

## 2.2. Rise (/)

This tone is continuative and non-definitive. It is generally employed when a continuation of some sort is expressed or implied (it conveys an impression that something more is to follow). It is used in genuine 'Yes/No' questions (where the speaker does not know the answer), requests (imperative sentences implying a continuation, namely giving the person addressed an option of not complying), introductory phrases/clauses, in the first part of alternative questions, in the second part of tag questions where the speaker is not sure of the answer, in direct address and in enumerations (when listing).

### Yes/No questions

Have you read this /BOOK?

Shall we go out /NOW?

### Requests:

Pass the /BREAD, please.

### Introductory phrases/clauses

If he /CALLS, ask him to \COME.

All of a /SUDDen, the girl started to \CRY.

### Alternative Questions ( except the last alternative)

Can he speak /SPANish or \GERman?

She speaks /French, /German and \RUSSian.

### Direct address

/TOM, could you \HELP me, please.

Good \BYE, /TOM (at the end of an utterance, it may also be pronounced Good \BYE, Tom).

### Tag questions (asking for confirmation)

You don't speak Spanish, /DO you? (the speaker is not completely sure and asks for confirmation)

### Enumerations (Listing):

/ONE, /TWO, /THREE , /FOUR , \FIVE.

/RED, /BLUE, /BROWN and \YELlow.

She speaks /French, /German and \RUSSian.

### 2.3. Fall-rise ( \ / )

This tone also signals non-finality and continuation of the utterance. It signals a sense of limited agreement or response with reservation. It may also denote doubt or uncertainty.

1. A: I've heard that it's a good \SCHOOL. B: \ / YES. (implying "I do not completely agree with you". Here, A would probably expect B to go on to explain why he was reluctant to agree).

2. I \ / THINK so. (implying "but I'm not quite sure").

3. That's not what I \ / MEANT. (implying "though it may have sounded as if I meant it").

4. I'll do it if I \ / CAN.

5. It's \ / POSSible.

### 2.4. Rise-fall ( / \ )

This tone is used for expressing rather strong feelings of approval, disapproval, disbelief contrast or surprise.

- |   |               |
|---|---------------|
| A: You wouldn't do an awful thing like that, would you?           | B: / \ NO     |
| A: It is midnight   | B: / \ IS it! |
| A: Isn't the view lovely  | B: / \ YES    |
| A: I think you said it was the best so far.                       | B: / \ YES    |
| A: I'm extremely sorry, but I probably lost the book you gave me. | B: / \ WHAT?  |

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### ❖ Functions of Intonation

The choice of nuclear tone is also largely responsible for how we signal our emotions and attitudes (surprise, annoyance, enthusiasm, involvement, etc). It can also have a grammatical and a discourse function. Overall, intonation has four main functions: attitudinal, accentual, grammatical and discourse function.



## 1. Attitudinal Function

Intonation enables us to express emotions and attitudes as we speak, and this adds a special meaning to spoken language. For example, the same sentence can be said in different ways, which might be labeled ‘angry’, ‘happy’, ‘grateful’, ‘bored’ and so on.

For example, one may use a rise –fall with the word *yeah* when one is not really believing what is being said (in writing, No punctuation is really available to indicate this attitude, so one might write, “*Yeah, yeah*” *he muttered*, and hope that the correct idea is communicated). Another example is the word *Yes* pronounced with different tones: if someone calls you and you answer *yes* with a rising tone, you signal that you are opening an interaction with them; but if you say *Yes* with a falling tone, this may denote that you do not wish to speak to them and may even be interpreted as impolite.

A few examples about the attitudinal functions of the commonest intonation contours are provided in the table below:

Tone	Attitudinal function	Example
Fall	Finality/definiteness	I’m absolutely \CERTain - Stop \TALKing
Rise	More to follow	It won’t /HURT (encouraging)
Fall-rise	Uncertainty /doubt	You may be \ / RIGHT - It’s \ /POSSible
Rise-fall	Surprise /being impressed	You were / \FIRST - / \ALL of them

## 2. Accentual Function

Intonation helps to produce the effect of prominence on syllables that need to be perceived as stressed. In particular the placing of tonic stress on a particular syllable marks out the word to which it belongs as the most important in a tone unit. The nucleus can in fact go onto any syllable in the phrase, although some positions are more likely and more common than others. In a very neutral production, the nucleus is most likely to fall on the lexically stressed syllable of the final content word of the tone unit. This occurs in most cases.

It is possible, however, to change the position of the nucleus from this neutral or default setting in order to affect meaning. Putting the nucleus on a syllable other than the default draws our attention to that syllable and suggests it is important. Three important cases are New vs Old information, contrastive stress and emphatic stress.

**New vs old information:** Intonation indicates new information. In conversation, the tonic shifts as new, important words come in.

1. A: Where did you go in the summer?                      B: The south of FRANCE.
2. A: Which part of France do you prefer ?                B: The SOUTH of France.

In the first example, France is the most important word, so it is the tonic. In the response of speaker B in the second example (where the wording is identical), south has become the most important word because it gives new information (France has been mentioned in A's question, so it is considered as given information).

Other examples:

3. A: I fancy seeing a FILM.  
B: What KIND of film?  
A: Oh, Any kind of film.  
B: How about a COMedy?  
A: I can't STAND comedies. I'd rather see an ACTION movie.

4. A: I've lost my umBRELLa.  
B: A LAdy's umbrella?  
C: Yes. A lady's umbrella with STARS on it. GREEN stars.

**Emphatic stress:** when the speaker wishes to place emphasis on a particular element. For example in the following brief exchange, B places emphatic stress on really to indicate a strong degree of enjoyment.

- A: How do you like the new computer you bought?  
B: I'm REALLY enjoying it!

Other examples are provided below:

Normal prominence (unmarked)	Emphatic stress
1.a. I'm never eating clams aGAIN.	1.b. I'm NEVER eating clams again. (implying the speaker had one a particularly bad reaction when eating clams).
2.a. It was very BORing	2.b. It was VERy boring (implying a strong degree of boredom)

**Contrastive stress:** it occurs when two parallel elements –either explicitly or by implication – can receive prominence within a given utterance. For example, in the following question, the speaker places prominence on both low and high to signal this important contrast in the sentence.

Is this a LOW or a HIGH impact aerobics class?

Contrastive stress can also occur across speakers without prominence necessarily occurring on both elements. in the following brief exchange, the contrast becomes apparent only with B s contribution: thus low is not stressed by speaker A, whose focus is on aerobics.

A:Is this the low aeRObics class?

B: No, it's the HIGH impact class.

Normal prominence (unmarked)	Contrastive stress
1.a.   She was wearing a red DRESS	1.b. She was not wearing a GREEN dress   She was wearing a RED dress
2.a.   I want to know where the train is COMing from	2.b.   I don't want to know where train is coming FROM   I want to know where It is going TO

In sum, the main idea or new information receiving prominence tends to occur toward the end in unmarked utterances (neutral prominence). However, the communicative context can override this general rule. Notice what happens when the speaker wishes to highlight some other element in the utterance:

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John's car is WHITE. (unmarked)

JOHN'S car is white. (contrast: not Albert's car)

John's CAR is white. (contrast: not his truck)

John's car IS white. (emphatic assertion: why do you say it isn't? I'm absolutely certain it is)

### 3. Grammatical Function

Another function of intonation is the indication of syntactic structure. The listener is better able to recognize the grammar and syntactic structure of what is being said by using the information contained in intonation. For example, intonation indicates the placement of boundaries between phrases, clauses or sentences.

| He usually comes late |

| He worked hard | and passed the exam |

| Because he worked hard | he passed the exam |

| A lot of industry's profits | go in taxation |

| Professor Bull | the Head of the Department | declared his support |

| I bought a nice new jacket | with a zip down the front | and a lot of pockets |

Intonation is also used to disambiguate grammatically ambiguous sentences.

1.a. | Those who sold quickly | made a profit | (A profit was made by those who sold quickly.)

1.b. | Those who sold | quickly made a profit | (A profit was quickly made by those who sold.)

2.a. | She read and graded papers | (she performed two activities relating to papers)

2.b. | She read | and graded papers | (she did a general activity of reading -perhaps including the papers-, and another activity of grading papers.)

Intonation is also used to distinguish the meanings of utterances that are identical. For example, it indicates the difference between questions and statements. In English, a rising tone is used for yes/no questions and a falling tone is used for statements.

| Is Bill a / DOCTOR | (rising tone)

| Bill is a DOCTOR | (falling tone)

However, it is possible to use a rising tone with a statement, making it a question:

| Bill is a DOCTOR | (statement: falling intonation)

| Bill is a /DOCTOR | (question : rising intonation)

#### 4. Discourse Function

Intonation can signal to the listener what is to be taken as NEW information and what is already GIVEN, can suggest when the speaker is indicating some sort of contrast or link with material in another tone-unit and, in *conversation*, can convey to the listener what kind of response is expected.

| Since the LAST time we met | when we had that huge DINner | I've been on DIET |

The first two tone-units present information which is relevant to what the speaker is saying, but which is not something new and unknown to the listener. The final tone-unit, however, does present new information. Writers on discourse intonation have proposed that the falling tone indicates new information while rising (including falling-rising) tones indicate 'shared' or 'given' information.

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- These lessons are adapted from "*A Course in Articulatory and Corrective Phonetics*" prepared by Dr. Zahia Bouchair.
  - For more details, refer as well to "*English Phonetics and Phonology: A practical course*" for Peter Roach.



## American vs English Pronunciation

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Accents differ in two ways: phonetically and phonologically. When two accents differ merely phonetically, we see the identical set of phonemes in both accents, but some or all of the phonemes are pronounced differently. For example, English learners around the world choose between two major models of English: General British (GB) and General American (GA). From vowel sounds and consonant pronunciations to stressed syllables and sentence intonation, the distinctions between these two varieties of English can be extensive and dramatic, but not to the point where the meaning changes. Some (but not all) notable differences are cited below:

### 1. The Pronunciation of /r/ - Rhoticity

Perhaps the most immediately noticeable difference lies in the pronunciation of the letter 'r'.

- **American English:** Most American accents are **rhotic**. This means that the 'r' sound is pronounced wherever it appears in a word, including at the end of syllables (e.g., *car* /kɑ:r/, *number* /'nʌmbər/, *water* /'wɔ:tər/, *horse* /hɔ:s/). The tongue typically curls back or bunches in the mouth to produce this distinct 'r' sound.
- **British English:** Most British accents, including RP, are **non-rhotic**. In non-rhotic accents, the 'r' is only pronounced if there is a vowel sound after it in the same syllable or the next (e.g., *car* /kɑ:/, *number* /'nʌmbə/, but *water ice* /'wɔ:tər aɪs/). The 'r' at the end of words or before consonants is generally silent. This single feature significantly alters the sound of many common words.

### 2. Vowel Sounds

The vowel systems of AmE and BrE exhibit substantial variations. Here are some key distinctions:

- **The /ɑ:/ vs. /æ/ and /ɒ/ sounds:**

- In words like *bath*, *grass*, and *dance*, RP traditionally uses a long, broad /ɑ:/ sound (as in *father*). General American typically uses the /æ/ sound (as in *cat*). However, there is regional variation within both countries, and some Northern English accents also use /æ/ in these words. /æ/ is pronounced with a shorter and lower tongue position compared to /ɑ:/, which is pronounced with a longer and more open tongue position.
- The vowel in words like *cot* and *caught* is often distinct in BrE (/ɒ/ in *cot*, /ɔ:/ in *caught*), while many American accents have merged these, resulting in both words being pronounced with /ɑ:/ or /ɔ:/ depending on the specific merger. Regarding /ɑ/ vs. /ɒ/, in the word "lot," for example, American speakers would use the vowel /ɑ/ while British speakers would choose /ɒ/.

- **The /ɜ:/ vs. /ər/ sound:**

- In words like *bird*, *first*, and *work*, RP uses a long vowel sound /ɜ:/ (often described as a "burred" sound). In General American, this vowel is typically followed by an /r/ sound, resulting in /ər/.

- **The /oo/ vs. /əʊ/ sound:**

In the words GO /goʊ/, NO /noʊ/, SHOW /ʃoʊ/ for example, Americans would use the /oo/ accent while UK speakers would say /əʊ/. /oo/ is pronounced with rounded lips and a slightly higher tongue position, while /əʊ/ is pronounced with more relaxed lips and a slightly lower tongue position.

### **3. Consonant Sounds**

While the differences in consonant sounds are generally less dramatic than those in vowels, some notable variations exist:

- **T-Glottalization:** Glottal stops /ʔ/ can be tricky for non-native speakers, as a challenging sound. There are certain instances where a double T is replaced with a glottal stop in some British English pronunciations, like in the word “bottle” /'bɒʔl/ or “button” /'bʌʔn/ for example. In other cases, those T's are pronounced as a clear /t/ sound.
  - **T-Flapping:** In American English, a /t/ or /d/ sound between two vowels, where the second vowel is unstressed, often becomes a flap [ɾ], which sounds very similar to a quick 'd' or the Spanish 'r' in *pero*. This is why *latter* and *ladder*, or *metal* and *medal* can sound almost identical in many American accents. This phenomenon is not typical in RP. Though in regional British accents, most famously cockney, this would be a glottal stop: WATɾER, GOTɾ IT.
  - **H-Dropping:** While not a feature of RP, many regional British accents exhibit "h-dropping," where the initial /h/ sound in words like *house* or *herb* is omitted. This is generally not a feature of standard American accents, where the /h/ is typically pronounced such as in “herb” /hɜrb/.
  - **Yod-Dropping:** The /j/ sound (as in *you*) after certain consonants like /t/, /d/, /n/, /l/, /s/, and /z/ is often dropped in American English. So, words like *tune* might be pronounced /tu:n/ instead of /tju:n/ (common in BrE), *duty* as /'du:ti/ instead of /'dju:ti/, and *suit* as /su:t/ instead of /sju:t/.
- British English often keeps a "y" sound (/j/) after "t" or "d": "Tuesday" → /'tju:zdeɪ/

American English often drops the "y" sound: "Tuesday" → /'tu:zdeɪ/
- **The 'L' Sound:** While subtle, the pronunciation of 'l' can vary. American English tends to have a consistently "dark L" (where the back of the tongue is raised), even at the beginning of words. British English often distinguishes between a "clear L" at the beginning of words and a "dark L" at the end.
  - In America, we would pronounce the word “schedule” beginning with a /sk/ sound, making the word /'skɛdʒu:l/. In British pronunciation, however, that initial /sk/ becomes /ʃ/. The word “schedule” then becomes /'ʃɛdʒəl/. This only appears in the word “schedule,” not in other similarly spelled phrases such as “school” or “scheme.” Both American and British speakers would employ the /sk/ pronunciation of these words.

### **4. Stress Patterns**

The placement of stress within a word can also differ between AmE and BrE, sometimes even for the same word.

- **Two-Syllable Verbs Ending in '-ate':** Many two-syllable verbs ending in '-ate' are stressed on the first syllable in American English and on the second syllable in British English (e.g., *donate* /'dɒneɪt/ (AmE) vs. /dəʊ'neɪt/ (BrE)).
- **Words of French Origin:** Some words of French origin retain the final syllable stress in American English, while British English shifts the stress to the first syllable (e.g., *garage* /gə'reɪʒ/ (AmE) vs. /'gærɪdʒ/ (BrE)). However, this is not a universal rule, and some words follow the opposite pattern (e.g., *address* /'ædres/ (AmE) vs. /ə'dres/ (BrE)).

## **5. Intonation and Rhythm - The Music of Speech**

Beyond individual sounds and word stress, the overall intonation patterns and rhythm of American and British English can also be distinct.

- **Intonation:** The melody of British and American speech differs significantly, despite the fact that the speech pattern is extremely similar. The most noticeable distinction is the British tendency to utilize a high falling intonation, hitting the primary stress high and lowering down. Rising tones are more common in America. This usage of increasing intonation in remarks is frequently referred to as "upspeak."

**In other words,** American speakers typically use a rising-falling intonation pattern, where the pitch rises in the middle and falls at the end of a sentence. For example, "I'm going to the store" has a pitch rise on "going" and a fall on "store." In contrast, British English typically uses a falling intonation pattern throughout the sentence.

- **Rhythm:** English is a stress-timed language, meaning that stressed syllables tend to occur at relatively regular intervals, with unstressed syllables compressed or reduced in between. The specific way this stress-timing is realized can vary slightly between AmE and BrE, contributing to the overall perceived rhythm of the speech.

## **Conclusion**

The differences in pronunciation between American and British English demonstrate the dynamic character of language, as well as the impact of geographical separation and autonomous cultural development. While these variances can occasionally cause amusing misunderstandings, they rarely inhibit efficient communication. As English learners, grasping these essential characteristics can considerably improve your listening comprehension and allow you to make more educated decisions about which accent to copy. Remember that there are numerous regional accents in both the United States and the United Kingdom, each with their own distinct phonetic traits. The generalizations discussed in this lesson illustrate broader tendencies, particularly in the commonly accepted standard forms of each variety.

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